SECURE GUEST CHECK PRESENTATION DEVICE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a guest check presentation device for delivering a bill, credit card, credit card receipt and the like in a secure and attractive fashion. In particular, the invention provides a presentation container of two symmetrical panels which include a fastener for securely closing the panels. The device securely contains the items necessary for a guest services transaction.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Many restaurant patrons are accustomed to receiving their meal bills in a presentation folder which is typically made of leather, vinyl or faux-leather materials. These inexpensive folders are sometimes provided by credit or bank card issuing companies and have credit card trademarks and logos embossed thereon. One disadvantage of these conventional bill presentation folders is that they quickly become dirty and unattractive and do not present an image of the establishment in a favorable light. Furthermore, folder-style devices are unsecured and open devices where loose receipts, change, pens, and other exposed and other unprotected items may be dropped or misplaced. Such conventional check folders do not provide security of the items placed within and do not typically project a satisfactory image of quality for the service establishment.

In general, bill folders are known in the art. Representative patents include: U.S. Patent No. 5,355,115 to Goor, et al. which discloses a device to signal the wait staff in a service establishment; U.S. Patent No. 6,076,079 to Boston et al. which discloses a billfold with an electronic tip calculator built therein; U.S. Design Patent No. Des. 420,383 to Dressel which shows a billfold with calculator; U.S. Patent 6,184,788 B1 to Middlemiss et al. which discloses a credit card wallet with electronic means to alert the user that a credit card is missing; and U.S. Patent No. 6,409,357 to Thompson et al. and U.S. Patent No. 5,639,156 to Broxson which each disclose foldable devices for illuminating reading materials such as a guest check. None of the foregoing devices offers the security, durability, attractiveness and convenience of the present invention.

An advantage of the present invention over the known art is in the provision of a secure box-like device to protect the contents of the guest check transaction in a

secure, attractive and durable manner. The invention device comprises a container having a secure compartment and an attractive, low maintenance appearance, and which may more particularly portray attractive and distinctive artwork, designs or other indicia specifically selected by the establishment.

A general objective of the invention is to provide a credit card and guest receipt container that improves the transaction between the establishment and its patron by securing the contents contained therein.

Another broad objective of the invention is in the provision of a secure billfold made of two symmetrical panels which are attached and include a fastener for securely closing the panels and protecting the contents therein.

A more specific object of the invention is to promote and improve the image of a service establishment by adopting a secure and high quality guest check presentation device to replace conventional unsecured and inferior devices.

Another object of the invention is to provide a guest check presentation device that is attractive and simple to use while promoting guest interaction and security.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In the present invention, these purposes, as well as others which will be apparent, are achieved generally by providing a guest check presentation device to promote a secure transaction between a patron and the staff of a service establishment. It comprises a container having a secure credit card and receipt-containing compartment in an attractive, durable and securely closable container.

In one embodiment of the present invention a secure billfold for facilitating a service establishment transaction is provided. The secure billfold is comprised of two symmetrical panels each having four sides with walls extending from each side, preferably at a 90° angle, to form an interior portion therein. The walls are of sufficient depth to securely contain a credit card, guest check, cash, loose change, receipts and a writing implement. The walls have edges which meet when the billfold is closed. The panels are attached on one side by hinges, tape, or any other device that enables the billfold to open and close easily. The panels open to a 180° position.

A fastener is located on at least one of the edges or walls to secure the items contained within the billfold. The fasteners used in the invention include magnets, friction closures, hook and loop closures, ball and clasp closures, hasps and

zippers.

In another embodiment a guest check presentation device is provided which facilitates a secure transaction between a patron and a service establishment and comprises a closable container having a cover region fold ably connected to a base region and at least one closure means for securely fastening the cover and base regions.

The guest check presentation device comprises a hollow case which can be opened to reveal the interior of the case, and closed to conceal the interior of the case and its contents. The case is comprised of a top or cover region and a bottom or base region, which is pivotally attached thereto. The top may be hinged to the bottom, and when opened and moved apart reveals the contents of the case. The base includes a horizontal flat bottom member of adequate size to contain the guest check and related items. The bottom member is formed with upwardly extending front, rear and opposite side walls. The walls are preferably at a 90° angle from the bottom member. The cover section is similarly formed and is pivotally attached to the base and is movable between open and closed positions. The device cover and base opens to a 180° position. The cover and the base are preferably in symmetrical in depth dimensions. In alternate embodiments the depth of the cover and the base may vary and may not be identical.

The case incorporates fastening means to hold the container securely closed until access is required. The fastener for securely fastening the panels of the invention is preferably at least one pair of oppositely polar magnets and more preferably two such pairs. In a preferred embodiment these magnets are affixed to the inside surfaces of the walls, and may be concealed beneath the interior liner. Depending on the material of the panels, the magnets may also be embedded in the edges of the device. Other closure means used in the invention include friction closures, hook and loop closures such as Velcro™, ball and clasp closures, hasps, zippers, push and lock buttons and other means to secure the device.

The device also includes at least one credit card receiving aperture in a wall or edge of the cover or base section to secure the card while permitting the display thereof. At least one credit card holder is affixed to the interior of the base or cover and is in proximity to the credit card receiving aperture.

The interior of the device may be optionally but preferably covered with a soft

durable liner material. The interior of the device may also have at least one receipt flap or holder. Preferably the receipt flap or holder is affixed to the interior liner.

The present invention is generally of rectangular construction and made of a durable material selected from metal, wood, plastic, leather, rubber, vinyl, reinforced fabric, corrugated paper and paperboard. Fabric may be reinforced with materials such as corrugated board and the like. Other container shapes and sizes, such as square boxes or ovals and other materials are encompassed within the scope of the invention.

Preferred materials due to their durability and attractiveness include metal, wood and plastics. Metal and wood are preferred because of durability and ability to be readily fabricated, finished, polished, and decorated. Metals such as steel, iron, brass or aluminum are strong, attractive, secure and durable. Solid wood and wood veneers are also durable and attractive. Injection molded thermoplastics which can be readily molded may also be used to form the invention devices.

The guest check presentation device can further include a decorative or visual component on the exterior surface of the device. The visual component may comprise a design or artwork, written messages or advertising such as a logotype or service mark or any other visual means to communicate a message or with indicia or artwork of significance to the service establishment.

The guest check presentation device can further include a storage area for carrying or securing objects such as a writing implement, and may contain a pocket for loose coins.

Other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent when the detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention are considered with reference to the drawings, which should be construed in an illustrative and not limiting sense as follows:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGURE 1 is an illustration of the interior portion of an embodiment of the invention;

FIGURE 2 is an illustration of an embodiment of the invention depicted in Figure 1 showing the device in a closed position; and

FIGURE 3 is a partial view of an embodiment of the present invention showing the fastener as a pair of magnets embedded in the edge of the walls of the device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention a guest check presentation device is provided to promote a secure guest services transaction.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the guest check presentation device of the invention, the first in an open position and the second in a closed position. In Figure 1, guest check presentation device 1 is partially opened in a vertical position, allowing a view of the interior of the device. In its preferred application the device opens to a 180 degree position.

The device is comprised of two symmetrical panels 2 and 3 which are connected by an attachment means to hold the panels together and permit the device to be opened and closed easily. In this embodiment, the attachment means are a pair of hinges 20 and 22 and permit the two panels to fold together. Other foldable connectors may be used including spring action, bendable metal flaps, plastic flaps, tape and the like, but hinges are preferred for their availability, security, durability and attractiveness.

The two symmetrical panels each have four sides with walls extending from each side to form an interior portion 60. The walls preferably extend 90 degrees from the panel surface. The walls are of sufficient depth to securely contain a credit card, guest check and writing implement. They have edges which meet when the device is closed. The edges are preferably flat, but may be devised in other shapes, including a narrow or pointed edge.

Figure 1 specifically depicts four walls 26 on one panel and four walls 27 on the other panel. In a preferred embodiment, apertures 24 and 25 are illustrated as being cut or molded into a wall 27 of panel 3. Aperture 24 in the upper wall 27 serves to expose a credit card or similar item when desired. Guest check presentation devices of the present invention will preferably have a single such aperture 24. However, it will be recognized that the aperture 24 may be oriented on either the horizontal upper portion of wall 26 or 27, or may be configured vertically along the side of either wall 26 or 27.

In an alternate embodiment, which is preferred in room service applications, only aperture 25 is present. Since there is no need for a credit card in these type of applications, aperture 24 is not needed.

Aperture 25 serves as a convenient place to leverage open the device, as with

a thumb or finger, and this is particularly useful when the container is secured with magnets, or hooks and loop configurations. Generally only one such aperture 25 is preferred, although multiple apertures may be used to aid in opening. This aperture 25 serves as an opening means for the device. Gentle pressure is applied to the aperture to easily open the panels to an 180° position to reveal the contents therein.

The device of the present invention is preferably held securely closed in this embodiment by two pairs of opposing magnets 10 and 12; and 14 and 16. Figure 1 depicts the placement of these magnets along the inner wall but it is understood that these may be hidden from view beneath a liner material or embedded in the edges themselves (the edges are not illustrated in this figure). Where the device is made of metal wood or plastic construction it is preferred that the magnets are embedded within the edges (see Figure 3).

At least one pair of fasteners and preferably two will be used in devices of the present invention. Magnets are preferred because of ease of implementation as well as the secure image provided to the patron, but other fasteners may be used and include friction closures, hook and loop closures, ball and clasp closures, hasps, zippers, push and lock buttons and other means to secure the device.

Liners 30 and 31, respectively, line the interior portion of the panels 2 and 3. Optional flaps 38 and 39, typically made of the same liner material, are provided to secure miscellaneous items. It is within the scope of the invention that the liner materials and the flap materials may be different if so desired. It is further understood that the panel liners may be fabricated from individual pieces or may be a single, integral piece which further serves to cover the foldable connectors. In the present embodiment where panel liners 30 and 31 are separate pieces, there is utilized an additional piece of liner material here designated hinge cover 34, 35. .

The present embodiment uses an attractive and durable artificial suede material as the liner but it will be recognized that many other materials may be used. Examples of these materials include both natural fabrics and man-made fabrics such as cotton, silk, satin, linen, felt, polyester, acetates, acrylics, nylon, etc.

In the present embodiment, credit card flap 36 is sewn onto lining 31 near aperture 24 and serves to secure the credit card with a frictional grip. It will be recognized in this embodiment that credit card flap 36 works in cooperation with

aperture 24, but several other useful alternatives may be utilized if desired. For example, the flap and aperture may be used on either panel portion of the device, and in either case, may be rotated up to 90 degrees if side apertures are desired.

Figure 2 is another view of the device illustrated in Figure 1. Guest check presentation device 1 is depicted in its closed and secure position, panel 2 lying above panel 3. In this view, decorative surface 4 is readily seen. It is also apparent how the edges of walls 26 of panel 2 meet and aligns with the edges of walls 27 of panel 3. In this view, aperture 25 in the side wall 27 is also readily apparent.

The guest check presentation device container is preferably made of a material which can be readily formed and decorated. The panels, walls and edges are constructed from a material selected from the group consisting of metal, wood, plastic, leather, rubber, vinyl, reinforced fabrics, corrugated paper and paperboard. In a preferred embodiment, the panels, walls and edges are the same material. However, it is within the scope of the invention that they each may be of different materials. Metal or wood is preferred due to durability, ease of fabrication and attractiveness. Metals and wood are readily finished, polished, and decorated, as by brushing, spraying, painting, printing, engraving, embossing, etching and application of labels, decals or artwork. Metals such as steel, iron, brass or aluminum are strong, attractive, secure and durable. If the device is fabricated from a die cut or stamped metal process, plastic or rubber trim or piping may be used along any exposed edges to provide a more finished appearance. Injection molded thermoplastics which can be readily molded also may be used. Suitable plastics may include polyethylene, polypropylene, high impact polystyrene, acetate, polycarbonate acrylic and other similar polymeric plastics and mixtures thereof.

The secure container is generally symmetrical and preferably of rectangular construction, however, other shapes, sizes and materials are encompassed by the invention.

The present invention will be illustrated in more detail by the following examples without limiting the scope of the claimed device in any way.

Example 1

In this example the device was constructed of metal sheet and had dimensions of approximately 12.75 cm by 22.75 cm and a thickness in its closed configuration of about 1.1 cm. In this example, the two symmetrical panels were of equal dimension and depth and opened with a pair of hinges to a 180 degree position. It is within the scope of the invention that the depths of panels may vary and can be of different.

Other attachment means such as spring action, bendable metal flaps, plastic flaps, tape and any other device to attach the panels together on one side may also be used.

Magnet closures were affixed to the inner surface of the walls of the panels beneath the liner material. The magnets were deployed approximately 5 cm from the top and bottom edges of the device.

Example 2

In this example the secure guest check presentation device was manufactured from wood. As illustrated in Figure 3, a portion of the base region is seen lying flat in an open position. Wall 40 including edge 42 is seen. Holes 44 and 46 have been bored into edge 42 in a perpendicular direction. These holes receive and contain small magnets affixed therein, which serve to secure the device when engaged with opposite magnets when the panels are in a closed position. The cover region, which is not illustrated in Figure 3, is of the same construction.

Thumb or finger indent 48 facilitates ease of opening the device. Artificial suede liner 50 lines the interior of the device. Flap 52 and pouch 54 are made of the same material as liner 50.

In this embodiment, the device in its closed configuration was approximately 13.75 cm by 23.5 cm and 2.0 cm thick. The wood panels and edges had an approximate thickness of 0.4 cm.

The fastening means can comprise one or more pairs of pressure-sensitive interlocking fastening surfaces, friction locking surfaces, other pressure-sensitive adherent fastening surfaces of the hook and loop type, or oppositely oriented

magnetic surfaces which attract one another when the compartment cover is closed. In a preferred embodiment the magnetic fasteners are used because of the secure feeling these offer the customer when the device is sealed. In addition the relatively small magnets which are used to secure the panels when folded to a closed position can be readily concealed, if desired, beneath an attractive compartment liner. Or in the case of wood or plastic construction, such fasteners may be readily embedded in the construction material of choice. Other, fastening means include a small hasp, which may require alteration of the complementary opening means, or may themselves incorporate the closing and opening means in a single embodiment. These design modifications should be readily apparent to those skilled in the art.

Finally, variations from the examples given herein are possible in view of the above disclosure. Therefore, although the invention has been described with reference to certain preferred embodiments, it will be appreciated that other materials may be devised, which are nevertheless within the scope and spirit of the invention as defined in the claims appended hereto.

The foregoing description of various and preferred embodiments of the present invention has been provided for purposes of illustration only, and it is understood that numerous modifications, variations and alterations may be made without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention as set forth in the following claims.